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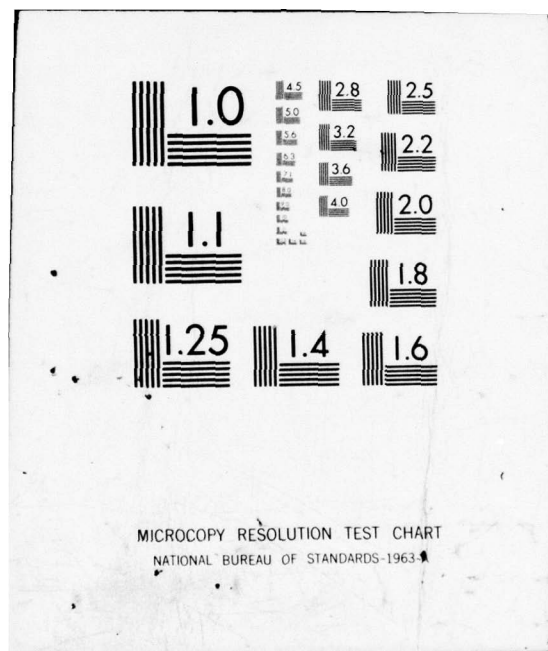
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An Exploratory Study Using
Critical Incidents and Rating Scales
to Compare Good and Bad Leadership

Edwin P. Hollander and Linda L. Neider
State University of New York at Buffalo

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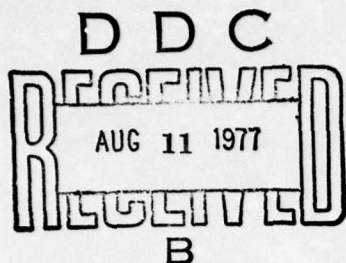
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A major need in assessing leader behavior is to know more about how it affects followers. The so-called "trait approach" to leadership tried to specify characteristics which differentiated effective from ineffective leader behavior. But this approach did not deal so much with actual behavior as it did with personality measures. A link was often merely assumed to exist between these measures and the leader's behavior. Another technique tried was to get self-reports by leaders. However, these suffer from subjective biases and need to be checked against the observations of subordinates.

An important departure in behavioral research on leaders was begun in 1947 by the Personnel Research Board at Ohio State University (see Stogdill & Shartle, 1948; Shartle, et al., 1949). Much of the early work was done in military commands, with the intention of providing information on the actual behavior of leaders in higher-level positions in such organizations. Studies were done looking at patterns of leader behavior which characterized positions, and also those which cut across various positions.

A questionnaire was developed which required frequency ratings by subordinates for each of nine dimensions of leader behavior. These were: Initiation, Membership, Representation, Integration, Organization, Domination, Communication, Recognition, and Production. It was administered to members of many different organizations who were asked to describe their leaders by the frequency with

which they displayed these behaviors, from "always" to "never." When these ratings were analyzed, it was found that they fell into four main factors. The two chief ones, which accounted for the great bulk of leader behavior, were the well-known pair of "consideration" and "initiation of structure," and the other two were "production emphasis" and "sensitivity" (see Stogdill, et al., 1953; Fleishman, 1973).

In a related departure, the critical incident technique was developed by Flanagan (see 1954) and used initially in evaluating pilots in World War II. Essentially, critical incidents are reports of actual behaviors observed and evaluated as particularly effective or ineffective. This permits a more open-ended view to be presented by the observer than is possible with specified rating scales, such as those used in the Ohio State University studies, valuable as they are.

The "incident" is chosen by the observer to report a relatively complete behavioral sequence which allows an inference to be drawn about the individual involved in the activity. To be "critical," say in differentiating good from poor leadership, Flanagan (1954) indicates that the incident must occur in a situation which is well understood by the observer; it should also be seen by the observer as illustrative of a class of events. The technique has been used widely with success to describe the major variables distinguishing effective and ineffective flight crew commanders in the military, and managers in industry, among other uses (Fivars, 1973).

The critical incidents technique can also be employed as an attitudinal measure. This was done in a study comparing Naval Aviation Cadets who successfully completed Basic Flight Training with those who voluntarily withdrew (Hollander & Bair, 1954). All of these respondents were asked to describe their "best" and "worst" flight instructors. Content analyses revealed a

significant difference in the kinds of descriptions offered by the two categories of Cadets. Those who successfully completed training described their "best" and "worst" instructors more with regard to interpersonal qualities, while those who withdrew emphasized the instructors' competence as a teacher. A motivational interpretation of these findings was offered, stressing personal identification with the instructor as a factor associated with success in training.

Also noteworthy as a means for tapping interpersonal perceptions, is the peer nominations technique. Earlier research for ONR with peer nominations (e.g., Hollander, 1954, 1956a, b, c, d, 1965), and later experimentation on leader authority (e.g., Hollander & Julian, 1970), has shown the significance of the followers' perceptions of leader characteristics. This research also serves as an approach to the further exploration of leader style.

Among the chief findings of this earlier work on leader-follower relations are these points: the leader's competence in facilitating the group's task affects other variables in the followers' responsiveness to the leader; related to competence, is the leader's perceived motivation, or interest, in the other group members as well as the task; and the leader's legitimacy, or source of authority in election or appointment, differentially affects the leader's exercise of influence (Hollander & Julian, 1970).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to attain more understanding of the relational qualities of leadership. These are often described in terms of "leader style," as in Fiedler's contingency model (e.g., 1967, 1974). However, the emphasis here is on a more rounded view of style as it is perceived by followers across varying situations of leader legitimacy.

Basically, the problem in studying almost any social behavior is the interaction of stable dispositions of an individual and the demands of such social

situations. This is especially true of an interpersonal phenomenon such as leadership. The failure of most traditional personality measures to predict leader behavior (Mann, 1959), has now produced the newer view that such behavior is an interactive function of personality dispositions and the situation (e.g., J. McV. Hunt, 1965; Mischel, 1973).

What seems required to further the predictive quality of the study of leadership in groups and organizations is a better grasp of these interactive qualities in social interaction. Therefore, the present study seeks to extend this concept into an understanding of the relational qualities of effective and ineffective leadership. The approach employs both critical incidents and ratings. This should help to get at what people involved in leadership events describe and evaluate as significant relational features of leadership they have experienced. In this regard, Shartle (1956) has made the point that when executives come together to talk about leadership, "...examples of failure and success are lively topics. This can lead into the discussion of events and the need to distinguish between... 'goodness' or 'badness.'" (p. 10).

Method of Study

As indicated, the research to be reported is an attempt to study leadership as viewed by followers. The technique used is to gather critical incidents and content analyze them to identify relational qualities making for leadership perceived to be good or bad. In addition, rating scales are applied to gather information on relational qualities of the leader. Information is also obtained about the leader's source of authority, as a basis for legitimacy, and whether the leader is a male or female. This provides some interesting possibilities for cross-sex analyses.

In all, more than 100 males and females, of various ages and work backgrounds, have served as respondents in these studies. Each respondent is presented with a

form which asks for his or her sex and age, and then specifies:

This is a study of leadership from the standpoint of personal experience. It is anonymous in that you will only be identified by a number and by your sex and age.

Please think of a group or organization to which you belong, or did belong, and describe a situation you experienced where good leadership was displayed. Try to be as clear as possible in describing the conditions and behaviors involved.

An identical form was then provided with the term "bad" substituted for "good." Earlier pilot research, alternating the good form before the bad, indicated no order effects. Therefore the good-bad order was employed in gathering the data to be reported here.

Respondents then rated the two, using a set of rating scales, each with a descriptive explanation. These scales were initially prepared by giving attention to variables mentioned in the literature as being associated with effective vs. ineffective leadership. After pilot study, and further pruning and editing, these seven were used in the present investigation. At this stage, they represent an exploratory instrument to measure dimensions of leader-follower relations, but not a finished product.

The major rating scale employed is attached as Appendix A. The seven characteristics it lists are as follows: Compliance, Directiveness, Involvement, Perceptiveness, Rewardingness, Time Orientation, and Trustworthiness. Whether the operative terms "good" or "bad" are used, the form is the same. At the end of each form it will be noted that respondents were asked to indicate whether the primary actor in the incident was appointed or elected. There was also a place to check neither, with an explanatory comment. Ultimately, this provided the basis for making a differentiation between appointed and non-appointed leaders.

The sample of respondents was drawn from students in one evening division and two day division introductory psychology courses at the State University of New York at Buffalo. No major differences in the response patterns were found between the evening and day division courses.

Unfortunately, not all of the respondents completed all of the forms. There were 74 who did, and who could be used for virtually all analyses. Of these, 40 were males and 34 females. The median age of the sample was 23. Of the 74 respondents, 13 were under age 20, 35 were between 20 and 24, 14 between 25 and 28, 8 between 30 and 34, and 4 who were 35 or older.

Results and Discussion

In general, the results showed consistent differences in the critical incidents and ratings for good and bad leaders. Furthermore, the most striking effect was that appointed vs. non-appointed leaders produced significantly divergent results for bad leadership, but not for good leadership. It should be noted that the non-appointed category was a conglomeration of elected and emergent leaders, based upon a study of the explanatory comments, where there was a doubt.

Also noteworthy was a sex-linked finding in the form of a tendency for female respondents to give many more incidents with females ($f = 20$) rather than males ($f = 11$) as leaders under the bad leadership condition. These same female respondents mentioned an equal number of males and females ($f = 16$ for each) as leaders under the good leadership condition. Male respondents rarely mentioned female leaders in either condition (good: $f = 5$ of 38; and bad: $f = 7$ of 40). This set of findings would seem to suggest that females are more likely than males to have had experience with female leaders, and perhaps also to be more critical of them.

The content analysis of the critical incidents was done on the basis of allowing categories of leader behavior to emerge from a close reading of the

incidents given by the respondents. Two examples for each of the twelve content categories are given in Appendix B. An analysis was also done using a weighting system to indicate the degree to which a given behavior appeared in the incident. The latter produced no substantial difference in the ordering of the twelve categories for the good and bad conditions, and was discarded in favor of the simpler frequency measure.

The ranks shown in Table I are based on the first analysis, which is the frequency with which a behavior is mentioned. For good leadership, the five top content categories of leader behavior in order were: Organization, Expertise, Encouragement, Control, and Efficiency. For bad leadership, the five top content categories in order were: Smoothness, Organization, Expertise, Fairness, and Control.

The rank-difference correlation between good and bad leadership for all categories was .266, which was predictably low and non-significant. The differentiating categories, among the top five for each just listed, are Encouragement and Efficiency for good leadership, and Smoothness and Fairness for bad leadership. In the latter case, it is the lack of these leader behaviors which is the evident basis for the high frequency found. Therefore, in comparing the appointed and non-appointed leaders under bad leadership, Fairness appears to be more of an issue for the appointed leaders than for the non-appointed ones. This finding suggests that a leader's appointment makes particular demands for the quality of Fairness, and that its absence creates a negative judgment.

As an inspection of Table I also indicates, there are rank differences in these behaviors between appointed or non-appointed leaders in the good and bad leadership conditions. However, a significant ($p < .01$) rho of .838 was found between the two under the good leadership condition, but not under the bad leadership condition. In the latter case, the rho was -.18. It is nearly zero and indicative of a non-significant relationship.

Table 1: Rank order of frequencies of responses in twelve content categories from critical incident accounts of good and bad leadership, with leaders who are appointed or non-appointed. The n's in parentheses refer to the number of cases described.

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Good Leadership</u>			<u>Bad Leadership</u>			<u>All Leadership</u>		
	Appointed (42)	Non-Appointed (30)	All (72)	Appointed (44)	Non-Appointed (27)	All (71)	Appointed (86)	Non-Appointed (57)	All
1. Control	4	4	4.5	6.5	4	5	5	3	
2. Organization	1	1	1	4.5	1	2.5	1	1	
3. Efficiency	2	5.5	4.5	8.5	5.5	6.5	5	4.5	
4. Communicat ing	9	10.5	9	8.5	7.5	8.5	9	10	
5. Smoothness	6	7	6.5	1	5.5	1	2	6	
6. Encouragement	4	3	3	6.5	11.5	10	5	8	
7. Expertise	4	2	2	3	2.5	2.5	3	2	
8. Accessibility	11.5	10.5	11	10	10	11	11	11	
9. Cohesiveness	7.5	5.5	6.5	4.5	9	6.5	7	7	
10. Participation	7.5	8	8	11	2.5	8.5	10	4.5	
11. Fairness	10	9	10	2	7.5	4	8	9	8
12. Likability	11.5	12	12	12	11.5	12	12	12	

The appointed and non-appointed leaders were strongly differentiated in the bad leadership condition by Participation, Fairness, and Encouragement. The first of these was mentioned far more for non-appointed leaders, and the latter two far more for appointed leaders. Bearing in mind again that these are qualities which presumably are lacking, the striking thing is that they all are interpersonal.

A comparable rank order analysis was done on the seven rating scales, whose means are given as well in Table 2. The rank-difference correlation between the good and bad leadership conditions was $-.643$. This reveals a strong negative relationship between the two, but is not quite significant ($p < .10$). Appointed and non-appointed leaders were also compared within the good and bad leadership conditions. Once again there is an almost perfect rho ($.99$) for the appointed and non-appointed leaders in the good leadership condition ($p < .001$). In the bad leadership condition, however, a divergence is again found between the appointed and non-appointed leaders. The rho there is $.205$ which is low and non-significant. Overall, the rating scales for which t-tests significantly differentiated between good and bad leadership were: Involvement ($p < .0001$); Perceptiveness ($p < .001$); Rewardingness ($p < .001$); and Trustworthiness ($p < .001$).

For both the appointed and non-appointed leaders, good leadership is seen as demanding Trustworthiness and Involvement, and not Compliance. On the other hand, under bad leadership, the appointed leaders have Time Orientation rated highest, and Perceptiveness as lowest. Indeed, the latter's mean of $.95$ is the lowest in the table. The non-appointed leaders under bad leadership are rated highest on Compliance and lowest on Directiveness.

This set of findings generally confirms the ranks of content categories from the analysis of the critical incidents. For instance, Organization was the category with the highest frequency for the non-appointed leaders in the bad leadership condition. If this quality is lacking, then it seems consistent that those

leaders should also be seen as high on Compliance and low on Directiveness in the ratings. On the other hand, they were found next most frequently in the categories of Expertise and Participation. A lack in the latter does not seem to fit so easily with high Compliance and low Directiveness. Therefore, other considerations may be involved.

The intercorrelation data for these rating scales are shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5. In the first of these, good and bad leadership are treated in separate matrices. For the good leadership condition, Involvement is positively correlated with Perceptiveness ($p < .001$) and negatively correlated with Directiveness ($p < .05$). As might be expected, Directiveness is negatively correlated with Compliance ($p < .01$), while Perceptiveness is positively correlated with Trustworthiness ($p < .05$).

The lower matrix of Table 3 shows the intercorrelations of rating scales for bad leadership. There are many more significant correlations, of both a negative and positive sign, than there were for the good leadership matrix just discussed. A comparison of the good and bad matrices in Table 3 is instructive in showing that each of the significant correlations in the upper matrix is also found in the lower one. This provides strong confirmation of the stability of these relationships between good and bad leadership. In the bad leadership matrix, however, there are additional correlations of significance, such as that between Perceptiveness and Rewardingness ($p < .001$), which is the largest there.

In Table 4, good leadership is partitioned into two matrices, one each for appointed and non-appointed leaders. Comparing the two shows few discrepancies. However, a similar comparison in Table 5, for bad leadership, indicates a larger number of highly significant correlations between ratings for non-appointed leaders indicated in the lower matrix. Most notably, again, is the high correlation between Perceptiveness and Rewardingness ($p < .001$), which evidently

Table 3: Intercorrelations of seven rating scales for good and bad leadership.

<u>Good Leadership (N = 70)</u>							
<u>Variable Number</u>	<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Variable Number</u>			
				<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1	Compliance	-.337**	.180	.126	.127	-.023	.026
2	Directiveness		-.264*	-.171	-.183	.180	.098
3	Involvement			.417***	.094	-.006	.115
4	Perceptiveness				.212	-.061	.297*
5	Rewardingness					-.052	.189
6	Time Orientation						-.089
7	Trustworthiness						1.000

* $p < .05 = .236$; ** $p < .01 = .306$; *** $p < .001 = .386$

<u>Bad Leadership (N = 68)</u>							
<u>Variable Number</u>	<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Variable Number</u>			
				<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1	Compliance	-.445***	.416***	.377**	.258*	-.258*	.047
2	Directiveness		-.263*	-.445***	-.213	.458***	-.070
3	Involvement			.532***	.400***	-.047	.329**
4	Perceptiveness				.559***	-.185	.268*
5	Rewardingness					.019	.397***
6	Time Orientation						.190
7	Trustworthiness						1.000

* $p < .05 = .239$; ** $p < .01 = .311$; *** $p < .001 = .391$

Note: All significance levels for these r 's, and those given in succeeding tables, are based upon the Fisher-Yates table of critical values for the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, using $N-2$ for degrees of freedom.

Table 4: Intercorrelations of seven rating scales for appointed and non-appointed leaders under the good leadership condition.

<u>Good Leadership - Appointed (N = 40)</u>							
<u>Variable Number</u>	<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Variable Number</u>			
				<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1	Compliance	-.236	.121	.248	.342*	.047	.188
2	Directiveness		-.351*	-.261	-.383*	.036	-.148
3	Involvement			.478**	.025	-.066	.130
4	Perceptiveness				.213	-.071	.329*
5	Rewardingness					-.121	.192
6	Time Orientation						-.047
7	Trustworthiness						1.000

* $p < .05 = .312$; ** $p < .01 = .403$

<u>Good Leadership - Non-Appointed (N = 30)</u>							
<u>Variable Number</u>	<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Variable Number</u>			
				<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1	Compliance	-.436*	.254	-.023	-.141	-.128	-.093
2	Directiveness		-.192	-.085	-.013	.352	.210
3	Involvement			.305	.172	.094	.088
4	Perceptiveness				.199	-.050	.300
5	Rewardingness					.025	.148
6	Time Orientation						-.154
7	Trustworthiness						1.000

* $p < .05 = .362$

Table 5: Intercorrelations of seven rating scales for appointed and non-appointed leaders under the bad leadership condition.

Bad Leadership - Appointed (N = 43)

Variable Number	Variable Name	Variable Number					
		<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1	Compliance	-.378*	.278	.158	.103	-.318*	-.193
2	Directiveness		-.144	-.404**	-.212	.439**	.121
3	Involvement			.291	.262	-.146	-.007
4	Perceptiveness				.319*	-.279	-.121
5	Rewardingness					-.002	.172
6	Time Orientation						.286
7	Trustworthiness						1.000

* $p < .05 = .301$; $p < .01 = .389$

Bad Leadership - Non-Appointed (N = 25)

Variable Number	Variable Name	Variable Number					
		<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1	Compliance	-.440*	.454*	.423*	.412*	-.042	.283
2	Directiveness		-.256	-.276	-.187	.426*	-.189
3	Involvement			.629***	.468*	.166	.577**
4	Perceptiveness				.852***	.087	.599**
5	Rewardingness					.095	.655***
6	Time Orientation						.094
7	Trustworthiness						1.000

* $p < .05 = .397$; ** $p < .01 = .507$; *** $p < .001 = .619$

contributed to the same general result, shown in Table 3. These two qualities, and Involvement, are interrelated as a cluster for both appointed and non-appointed leaders under bad leadership. Since none is highly ranked, they evidently constitute deficits which followers perceive in bad leadership, though the intercorrelations are higher and more evident for non-appointed leaders.

Conclusions and Implications

In general, the results of this exploratory study lend support to the utility of these two techniques in discriminating between good and bad leadership. Both showed continued promise in developing a view of leader behavior from the perspective of followers. While there was not full correspondence in the data from the critical incidents categories and the rating scales, there was more than enough to support further work with them. To paraphrase Van Fleet (1974), it seems evident that the critical incident technique may be the way to develop a clearer definition of leadership.

An omission in this study was attention to the variables in the situations described. The nature of the activity was looked at, but not systematically analyzed, largely because of the fragmentary information often presented. Despite this limitation, which will be rectified in subsequent work, there were broad effects found for source of authority. Appointed and non-appointed leaders, significantly so under the bad leadership condition, showed many differences.

Of particular interest is the degree to which Fairness and Smoothness showed salience as qualities commented on frequently in bad leadership, especially with appointed leaders. This fits the finding of especially low ratings of these leaders for the three scales of Involvement, Perceptiveness, and Rewardingness.

It is striking that the non-appointed leaders, often defined here by not having been appointed, should show a sharp divergence in evaluations from the

appointed leaders, under the bad leadership condition. This suggests the strong effect of legitimacy as a factor in the followers' evaluations of the leader, and the need to study legitimacy further.

Finally, there is the necessary caveat about generalizability. This was, after all, an exploratory study. The limitations of the size and nature of the present sample make it inappropriate of course to generalize these findings without additional data. However, it is useful to take note of the differences found between good and bad leadership, and between appointed and non-appointed leaders, especially in the bad leadership condition.

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Here are some characteristics which people might show in their relationships with others. Look them over carefully, and think about how they apply to the person who was the primary actor ("the leader") in the situation of bad leadership you just described. Please rate the primary actor on how much he or she showed these qualities, by circling one number for each scale below the description.

1) Compliance is the degree to which a person goes along with others, especially when they are in the majority. Someone who is not considered compliant would be more assertive and independent in responding to what others demand of him or her.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

2) Directiveness is shown when an individual takes the initiative in structuring the way a group task is performed. A person high on directiveness gives structure to the task, e.g., by indicating the order of doing activities. Someone rated low on directiveness would encourage participation in deciding how a task should be done.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

3) Involvement is the degree to which a person shows responsiveness to others. Someone high on involvement would be interested in what another individual says/ or does, e.g., he or she would respond almost immediately to the questions or comments offered by someone else. A person rated low on involvement would be characterized by a lack of interest in others and in interpersonal relationships.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

4) Perceptiveness is the degree to which an individual shows awareness of and consideration for other people's interests, needs, and attitudes. An individual who is low on perceptiveness would be someone seen as insensitive to the feelings of others.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

5) Rewardingness is shown when an individual readily responds to and encourages another person. Someone who is low on rewardingness would rarely praise a person for his or her accomplishments.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

6) Time Orientation is shown when an individual is concerned about how time is allocated, e.g., he or she would insist on punctuality for self and others. Someone who is not time-oriented would be much more interested in the "experience" taking place rather than the amount of time involved.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

7) Trustworthiness is characteristic of someone seen as reliable, and who "can be counted on." An untrustworthy individual is a person who is unreliable, and who might behave in a way which contradicts his or her stated opinions.

A Great Deal 5 4 3 2 1 0 Not at All

PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS: Was the primary actor a Male___ or a Female___?

Was the primary actor appointed___ or elected___ to his or her position, or neither___? If neither, please explain on the back of this sheet.

Thank you very much.

APPENDIX B

Examples of Content Categories

1. Control
 - "pressures were applied"
 - "suppressing any tangents of thought"
2. Organization
 - "organized the meeting"
 - "...he had no specific framework or course plan"
3. Efficiency
 - "things always ran smoothly"
 - "she was slow in her actions"
4. Communicating
 - "communicates often in a relaxed...manner"
 - "wouldn't give me the information I asked for"
5. Smoothness
 - "was kind, sympathetic and helpful..."
 - "arrogant"
6. Encouragement
 - "he always had a compliment for you"
 - "he rarely encouraged us"
7. Expertise
 - "...had a great knowledge of his particular field..."
 - "he is very confused..."
8. Accessibility
 - "...will shirk any contact with their employees"
 - "...usually available for discussion"
9. Cohesiveness
 - "...organized people to work with him toward common goals"
 - "...members had a sense of 'belonging'"
10. Participation
 - "invited all questions..."
 - "wasn't afraid to answer questions, listen to suggestions..."
11. Fairness
 - "unbiased"
 - "had different standards for different boys"
12. Likability
 - "he was well liked..."
 - "...was very easy going and well liked"

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